

BACKWARD THINKING, PART 3

If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. (Hebrews 11:15-16a, NIV)

A FRIEND HIT THE PROVERBIAL NAIL ON THE HEAD the other day when he observed that, having grown used to golf on a well-manicured course, it really is no fun to return to the muni, with its burned-out fairways and pitted greens. No one considers it a treat to go back to what’s ugly, inferior, sad.

What we will allow ourselves, however, is a yearning for what we remember to be good—even when that means conveniently erasing everything negative surrounding our past experience. A golfer, for instance, might fondly think back on a birdie made at a particular hole that has otherwise been a real nuisance for him. A business owner can make the mistake of eyeing one good quarter to the exclusion of three weak ones and never make the adjustments necessary for long-term success. Such singular references can cloud our perspective and do damage to our decision making.

If we do not look back with honesty and balance, we risk becoming like the common Israelites, whose struggles in the wilderness sparked a nostalgia lacking true references. There was meat in Egypt, and tasty veggies. And surrendering to the complaint of their palates, the people began to grumble that even Egypt would be better than manna. Egypt, with its generations of slavery and oppression. This Egypt somehow looked good for the sake of a burger.

Among these people of old, however, were a handful who saw things differently. By not even bothering to think of the life behind them, they were not tempted to seize the opportunity to return. Rather, they set their eyes on what God had in store for them—even as Christ “for the joy set before him endured the cross” (Hebrews 12:2). In looking forward like this, they escaped the grip of unhealthy nostalgia and saw instead the fullness of God’s promises.

Amazingly, we can be captivated by memories of our former life—a life of sin!—remembering the pleasures and not the consequences. But God would have our eyes trained on heaven. He knows that those who really are heavenly-minded have much to offer in the way of earthly good, for they are not caught up in trivialities, pride quests, or selfish worries. Their eternity is assured, making their present a close walk with the Lord.

Opening questions How have you seen looking back in your life become a hindrance to going forward? What do you think is a healthy perspective on looking back?

READING Numbers 13:21-14:24

Fear (Numbers 13:21-14:4)

How did Caleb’s perspective differ from those of the other scouts into the Promised Land? How did the bad report of the other scouts affect the people?

Faith (Numbers 14:5-9)

What key actions and words marked the stance of faith taken by Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb?

Consequences and promises (Numbers 14:10-24)

How serious was the sin of the rebellion of the people in God’s eyes? How did Moses appeal to God on their behalf? What consequences did the people suffer for their lack of faith? How did Caleb catch the Lord’s attention in a much different way (v. 24)?

Written by Jeff Hopper ©2015 Links Players International. A 6-minute video accompanies today’s study at https://youtu.be/U_LIXMobbD0